

**U.S. Department of State
Office of the Spokesman**

**For Immediate Release
2006/T1-1**

January 16, 2006

REMARKS

**Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice
En Route Monrovia, Liberia**

January 15, 2006

SECRETARY RICE: I am looking forward to joining the First Lady for the inauguration of the first woman African president which is a very exciting thing. It is exciting for the continent, but it is also exciting because if you think back to three years ago or so in Liberia when the front pages of the papers were covered with pictures of young kids holding AK-47s, Charles Taylor was rampaging in the country, there were armed gangs everywhere, I think it would have been hard to imagine that they would have had a free and fair elections this fall and now be inaugurating this woman as President.

I just want to recall that I think this was an example of U.S. cooperation with African leadership that led to Charles Taylor's removal or Charles Taylor leaving Liberia and then the stabilization of the situation. The United States actually put a small mission in to safeguard ports of entry to the airport at the time. We worked very closely with the ECOWAS under the excellent leadership of President John Kufour of Ghana, but also with President Mbeki and President Obasanjo there was a very fine Nigerian head of the temporary mission until the UN peacekeeping mission could get there, and General Okankwo, who by the way is now in Sudan, doing good work there, and were able to stabilize the situation. The transitional government with Gyude Bryant in his place, and then eventually elections and the election of Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf.

It's obviously a very difficult situation. It's a poor country now despite the fact that it was once one of the more prosperous countries in Africa. But there's an awful lot of rebuilding to do after all of these years of civil war. We have provided \$840 Million in support, and the United States is going to continue to support Liberia. But it's going to be a hopeful day tomorrow and the Liberian people deserve a hopeful day.

QUESTION: Has the President elect indicated how she'll deal with Charles Taylor?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think that she understands how much the international community wants to see Charles Taylor brought to justice. I think she will be working on doing precisely that, but I don't want to speak for her and I think the focus of tomorrow is going to be on a future Liberia that can engage the international community toward a better, more prosperous future.

QUESTION: Are you concerned that it's going to take too long for Charles Taylor to be taken before the special court in Sierra Leone?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think that this will happen. It's what the international community wants. I think the Liberian people want justice. I think the Liberian leadership wants justice. And I just have to say, tomorrow should not be about Charles Taylor. Charles Taylor is out of Liberia. He is through raping and pillaging and splintering. And the Liberian people are trying to look forward and I really think we owe it to them to look forward, not backward.

QUESTION: If I could just ask a question a bit far afield, in Pakistan. Now you have a situation that's emerging. You have protests and demonstrations over this bombing that didn't get Zawahiri but apparently killed 18 people. Is this a public diplomacy problem and how are you going to address that now?

SECRETARY RICE: I don't have anything for you on the specific situation in Pakistan. Obviously, the Pakistanis are great allies in the war on terrorism. It's a very difficult area. The Waziristan frontier area is extremely difficult. It's been lawless for a long time. Pakistani forces are operating there and trying to take control. We're trying to help, but I don't have anything on the specific situation. We'll continue to work with the Pakistanis and we'll try to address their concerns.

QUESTION: But --

QUESTION: Do you know if Zawahiri was the target?

SECRETARY RICE: I just don't have that information.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) that it's going to put more pressure on the (inaudible) in Pakistan? It's already raised a lot of opposition, cooperating so closely with the United States. Are you concerned that these protests are going to mushroom into something much more serious?

SECRETARY RICE: It's obviously difficult at this time for the Pakistani Government, but I think that I would just say to both the Pakistani Government and the Pakistani people we are allies in the war on terror. We've made a lot of progress by cooperation in the war on terror. You know, the biggest threat to Pakistan, of course, is what al-Qaida has done in trying to radicalize the country, the extremist elements that really occupied the country in many -- occupied parts of the country. And of course they've tried twice to assassinate President Musharraf. These are not people who can be dealt with lightly, but I can't speak to the specifics on the (inaudible) today.

QUESTION: I want to move to Iran. I understand that you spoke with Kofi Annan today (inaudible).

SECRETARY RICE: It was yesterday, yeah.

QUESTION: Oh, it was yesterday? Well, can you give us an update on that and whether or not the Chinese and the Russians are on board with moving to the UN Security Council?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I have very good conversations with a number of foreign ministers whose countries are members of the IAEA Board of Governors, just reinforcing the position that the EU-3 took the other day that they've got to finally to demonstrate to Iran that it can't with impunity just cast aside the just demands of the international community.

I think I'm not going to speak for the Russian or Chinese governments. I think the Russian Government has spoken very eloquently on its own. They're disappointed in what the Iranians have done, that it's a serious matter. I think the Russians tried to give the Iranians an alternative way to meet their civil nuclear needs but in a way that would have been less of a proliferation risk. The Iranians have done nothing but throw all of this aside and go and start breaking seals and talking about enriching and reprocessing. They are isolated. They are completely isolated.

Now, I've said all along that at a time of our choosing, at the right time, it was going to be time to go to the Security Council. I think it's clear the time is coming. And but the most important thing here is that wherever countries are on the various tactics over the next couple of weeks, I don't think that there is anybody who has spoken favorably about what Iran has done. They're getting nothing but condemnation for what they're doing.

QUESTION: Senator McCain on TV basically said today that he doesn't think sanctions are going to work and we really have to keep open a military option. I know what you said about the military option, but do you think there is a realistic chance of getting binding sanctions that will work at the end of this?

SECRETARY RICE: Let's get to the Security Council -- the advantage of the Security Council is it has authority and eventually it has authority under Chapter 7 to compel states to act. I do not believe that Iran

can withstand the kind of isolation that other states have endured when they are in the Security Council. Iran is a different country, a different kind of population. It's a country that is accustomed to a lot of interchange, people go back and forth, lots of trade and economic relations. And they're putting a lot at risk here and I'm hoping, with others that when this regime recognizes or faces the fact that it's about to be really pretty fundamentally isolated, that they'll reconsider their options.

QUESTION: Do you think though we'll have to get to the point where we at least threaten the possibility of force to make them focus on this?

SECRETARY RICE: I don't think it's helpful to speculate. We've said all along the President keeps all of his options -- always keeps all of his options. But the course that we're on is a diplomatic course, and again I just would draw people's attention to where we were a year ago this time when people were saying that it was the fault of the United States that the Iranians wouldn't come to the table. We backed the EU-3 negotiations, backed them fully, made some moves of our own, and now you couldn't have greater unity between the United States and its European allies, and I think others are coming that way as well. And when you get that kind of unity and that kind of message I think things start to happen.

QUESTION: What would you like to see a special IAEA meeting?

SECRETARY RICE: I think it ought to be as soon as possible. Now, it will take a little time to arrange. I mean, it's not going to be tomorrow. But the problem with waiting for, you know, the regular meeting in March or waiting for a long time is that I think the Iranians will try to take advantage of it to start to (inaudible) and to obfuscate, the kind of thing that they tried to do the other day with the UN where they had a (inaudible) way of saying things that they've been saying all along. And so we just can't let them do that.

There is some diplomacy to be done. As you know, Nick Burns is leaving tomorrow for Europe. Bob Joseph is also going to Europe. I know that the Europeans are sending a number of their political directors out. We've had our ambassadors in. So there is some work to do because you'd like it to be a strong consensus but -- a strong consensus for the vote. But whatever the numbers of the vote, I don't think there's any doubt that people are quite clear that Iran has crossed the threshold.

QUESTION: Just coming back to Africa for a second, can I discuss Darfur? Because we've had a lot of discussion about trying to make it more of a UN mission than an AU mission. The AU mission seems to be either not going forward or falling apart. What is the United States prepared to do in terms of money and resources, people?

SECRETARY RICE: The AU mission is not falling apart. I mean, I think it's doing a good job but it's probably pretty close to the limits of what it can do in its current configuration. And there are issues of how to sustain it, and so that's why we favor a UN mission which has the quality of sustainability that comes from the whole UN peacekeeping system.

We probably should look also at what more NATO can do to help and I think those conversations will be on the way because NATO has been very important on the logistics side but there may be more that can be done in terms of support and planning and the like.

But there will undoubtedly also need to be forces, more forces, available for the AU mission and so we're going to be pretty soon here, I think, in the midst of seeing who might be willing to contribute more to the AU mission. The good news is that where the AU mission deploys, there's less violence. But there are some troubling developments, of course, on the border with Chad and inside of Chad, and that's one of the problems that is causing some deterioration of the situation in West Darfur and so we have to respond to that.

QUESTION: Is the U.S. willing to contribute troops to a mission like this?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the U.S. is part of NATO and we are involved now through NATO. I think

that the Africans have always wanted this to be an African mission. Hopefully, there are enough African forces that can contribute. But I think we'll just need to talk to our allies and see what might be needed.

QUESTION: Do you see this as international forces augmenting the AU peacekeepers or do you see this as an international peacekeeping force being in charge and having the AU submerged? How would it work?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it would be -- if it's a UN mission, it'll be a blue-hatted mission. But I think at the core of this is really the AU mission and nobody's going to try and -- I want to go back. The AU mission did not fail. The AU mission has succeeded in what it is trying to do. The circumstances are beginning to change in a way that suggests that the AU mission may not be sufficient and may not be sustainable over the long run, because when you have a UN peacekeeping mission you just have more capability in terms of financing and in terms of what kinds of forces. For a number of countries, having a UN mission is an important (inaudible) in contributing forces.

So I think this should be read as a success for the AU mission, but now to be able to sustain it is very critical and clearly it's linked to trying also to stimulate toward the Abuja process so that you can begin to get some people to peace talks and there are good things that have begun to happen there with the rebel forces starting to come together. So there's a lot going on.

QUESTION: Should the Khartoum government have a say or a veto over what's the composition, as they're trying to do?

SECRETARY RICE: I think the Khartoum government should be cooperative. They have a problem in Darfur and the international community expects them to contribute to solving it and also expects them to allow the international community to contribute to solving it.

QUESTION: But are you concerned that Khartoum -- the Khartoum government may be taking over the (inaudible) of the rotating chair of the AU, which is a possibility?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we'll see what happens with that --

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: I'm not going to comment on internal AU affairs. I'm going to let the AU resolve this.

QUESTION: But do you think it would be a conflict of interest to have them in charge?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, obviously the Khartoum government is, at this point, dependent on the AU to do something to try and solve the problem in Darfur, but I'm going to let the AU address this.

QUESTION: On the Palestinians and the elections, what would be the U.S. response if Hamas did end up being a significant part of the government? And I don't know, you probably saw Mr. Abbas said that he had no objections at all to Hamas winning.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, you know, he's the president. He's going to oversee free and fair elections and I think he's trying to be neutral. I will say that his own program is one that recognizes the right of Israel to exist, that recognizes a two-state solution, that recognizes the need to renounce violence, that is obligated under the roadmap to dismantle terrorist organizations. And so I don't think his program (inaudible) Hamas, but I think he's trying to be someone who allows these elections to take place in a free and fair way, and I think that's totally appropriate.

The fact is that after these elections, the ability of the Palestinians to engage the Israelis to move forward on the roadmap is obviously going to be dependent on having people in the governing structures who believe in the roadmap. And in order to negotiate with a party, you have to believe in its right to exist. In order to

have freedom of movement and access and peaceful development of the kind that the Quartet is pressing or that Jim Wolfensohn is pressing, you have to believe that violence is not acceptable.

And so we've said all along that this is a transitional process; we understand that. The Palestinians are going through their first free and fair nationwide elections for the Palestinian parliament. That's very good. But they will have a certain obligation to the international community, and anybody who governs is going to have to carry out those obligations. It's going to be a two-way street.

QUESTION: But on the U.S. response -- would the United States withhold aid? Or -- I mean, what happens if Hamas would renounce violence?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, let's just see what happens after the elections. Look, the Palestinian leadership and government will have to be responsive -- in order to access the roadmap and the Quartet, Wolfensohn, all of those elements, the Palestinian government will have to be responsive to certain basic elements in order to make it work. So we'll see, but I think that Abbas himself has been very clear that he understands that violence is not an acceptable course for the Palestinian people. He understands there has to be a two-state solution, and that if there's to be a two-state solution you have to recognize the right of Israel to exist.

QUESTION: Okay, last question. It's the "P" question, Madame Secretary. The First Lady all but nominated you for President. (Laughter.)

SECRETARY RICE: I thought the "P" question was on the Palestinians.

QUESTION: No, sorry, sorry, sorry. (Laughter.) Have you spoken to the First Lady about it at all? And you've said so many times you don't want to run for the office, or do you wish people wouldn't mention it so much?

SECRETARY RICE: You know -- obviously it's flattering when people say things, and the First Lady is not only a terrific person, she's my friend. And I'm -- you know, I was honored that she said it, of course.

QUESTION: Campaign manager? (Laughter.)

SECRETARY RICE: She's a wonderful person. But you know, I've spoken on this. I know what I'm good at, I know what I want to do, and that's not it.

QUESTION: What about Vice President, running on a Vice Presidential ticket?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the two are the same. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Thank very much.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

###